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764 probably not unlike the large mausoleum built on Atchin in the shape of a shark, which will be described in a future volume.[1]

MORTUARY RITES

I obtained three accounts of mortuary rites: an initial, brief account dealing with the death of a young man, and a later, fuller one regarding the death of a *mer-sean*, followed by a few notes regarding the mortuary rites for women. They are very far from exhausting the subject. I will give the rites for a *mer-sean* first.

It will be noted that while the Fifth Day is an important one, no special importance is attached to any kind of observance on the Thirtieth Day, thus showing the early cultural layer to which these rites belong.

MORTUARY RITES FOR AN OLD MAN (MER-SEAN)

Attitude towards the death of an old man.

761 While every effort is made to preserve the life of a young man who has fallen sick, nothing is done to prevent the death of a man so old as to be called *mer-sean*. The native's usual attitude towards death as a tragic event due to the anger of offended ghosts or to evil magic undergoes a complete transformation when the death is that of a very old man. For not only has he fulfilled his life and died a natural death, but his power over the living, great during life, will be immensely increased once he has crossed the line into the regions of the departed. As my informant expressed it, "at the death of a young man we are sorry that his life has been cut off, so we fast (*taur*). But for an old man, his time is finished and it is right that he should die, so we do not mourn, but adorn ourselves."

This attitude is borne out by their behaviour, for where, in the case of a younger man, the weeping is long and to a great degree genuine, for an old man, though both men and women must make a good show of weeping, this is only "make-believe" and is soon over, for he has died at a good old age, and none is responsible for his death.

Manner of death. Regulation of debts.

763 I did not myself witness any deaths on Vao. My experience on Atchin is, however, confirmed by Godefroy with regard to Vao, in that he

[1] The only piece of special ritual he mentions in connexion with the construction of this tomb is the ritual bathing of the workers, who at the same time chant. When the day's work was finished the workers "went in a group to bathe, and, on this occasion, the bathing was turned into a ritual act, the bathers singing a slow majestic and beautiful religious chant . . . [as] they stood in the sea with the water up to their chests and with their arms outstretched along its surface. All sing: but from time to time two or three sink down into the water, swim several strokes, come up again and take their place in the song. After half an hour of singing, when all the verses were finished, the bathing regained its secular character" (Godefroy, 1, 1934, p. 213).

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says that "they die calm and without apprehension." The two chief concerns of a man who knows he is about to die are:

(*a*) That his mortuary rites should be properly carried out. These he will often have partly performed already himself, and then he has no fear that his relatives will omit their part in sacrificing the necessary pigs.

(*b*) The regulation of his debts. Owing to the extremely complicated system of exchange and borrowing, there is no moment in a man's life when all the pigs in his possession are actually his own, or, conversely, when none of his own pigs have been lent to some relative or other. Such transactions, when they overstep a man's lifetime, as often they do, land his successors in disputes and difficulties from which they never fully disentangle themselves. For this reason, and because it is a man's pride to be recognised as a successful and wealthy man, who knows just where all his wealth is, and who owes no man what he cannot repay, one of a dying man's main concerns is to leave all his affairs publicly in order. He therefore sends out cycas-leaf tallies, on which the fronds on the left-hand side are plucked off so as to indicate his debts, and those on the right-hand the number and grade of pigs which he is owed. Debtors and creditors arrive, the former with pigs which they themselves have probably borrowed in order to pay back their debt, and a general settlement is made—that is to say, if the dead man is solvent. If he is not, his relatives strain every nerve to make him so. Disputes, however, not infrequently arise.[1]

[1] Godefroy recounts a modern case in point.

"Melte-sas died when he was about 65 years old. During his youth he had worked in Australia, in Queensland. When he came back to Vao, the old men pointed out to him how behindhand he was compared with those of his own age, who had already attained high rank by the sacrifice of large numbers of tusked boars. . . . He forthwith set about making up for lost time. Strong and courageous, he succeeded in amassing enough money, by the sale of copra, to obtain for himself an honourable place in clan debates. Driven by ambition, he wished to attain the rank of Melteg-amu. In order to reach this, he was compelled to borrow large numbers of tusked boars which he had been unable to repay. When he showed signs of dying, that is to say for the week preceding his death, all his creditors came to his house and, sitting squarely before him, reminded him of his debts. One put in a claim for three "*bouar*" [*bo-ware* —re-entrant-tusker] each worth £12: another pointed out that he had never repaid him the £10 of English money advanced to him for the purpose of prosecuting some rite: a third bitterly regretted having lent him four large pigs which had since inexplicably disappeared from circulation: lastly, two young braggarts loudly asserted that he had never properly paid for his last wife, and that they therefore claimed his last child, a young girl.

"To all these claimants the wretched Melte-sas replied by uttering an indisputable truth, namely that he was ruined, snowed under by debts owing to the downright bad faith of friends and enemies alike. He saw but one way in which they might recover at least part of what was justly owing to them; his son . . . would take service on a [white man's] trading-vessel and his wages would serve to pay off his father's debts. . . ."

On the other hand:

"Sum-tamat died as he had lived, swindling both relatives and friends. For twenty

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Mortuary Officials (*Talagh*)

764 767 The chief rôle in the mortuary rites for a *mer-saan* is taken by an official called *talagh*, whose main duty is the actual preparation of the body for burial. This man I will call the chief mortuary official. Certain other duties are performed by either one or more assistants, also called by the same name, whom I will therefore speak of as the assistant mortuary officials, though no such division of terminology exists in the native language. The word "official" alone will be used where the context makes it clear to whom it refers.

These men should be selected from among the members of the dead man's Lodge, but feeling is against the chief official being the own brother or son of the deceased. This may be because his intimate handling of the corpse would be too distressing to so near a relative; in any case, these relatives have too much to do to allow of their undergoing the confinement entailed. If a member of the dead man's own "Side of the Lodge" is not available for the office, then one will be chosen from the other "Side of the Lodge" belonging to the same Quarter.

All the mortuary officials sleep in the Quarter-Lodge (outside which the old man is buried) until the Fourteenth Day after death, when, after the launching of the canoe with provisions for the deceased, the duties of the assistant officials are over. The chief official remains in the Lodge till the performance of a special ceremony called *Tulagh*, or *Talogh*, when he makes his first public appearance and is paid for his services.[1]

Restrictions in regard to women.

764 767 834 There is no fasting for these men, but they may not have connexion with women for a year after the death of the old man, nor may they enter a woman's house (*ne-hime vavine*) during this period. During their fourteen days in the Lodge they may not be seen of women,[2] except by

763 426 years he had bled his fellow natives white by the practice of magic to obtain rain and wind. . . .

"He sent in his account in the form of a cycas leaf to all those concerned, who hastened to do him satisfaction by bringing all those pigs that they had been owing to him for so long. Stretched out on his mat, with tenderly appraising eye he surveyed this fine circle of pigs tethered around him, each at its stake. . . ." (Godefroy, 1, 1933, pp. 245-6.)

[1] See pp. 555-6.

[2] According to one statement, this only applies to the chief official, the others being allowed to go freely on errands connected with their work. In Wala, none of them may be seen, except a special one called the "outside official," who maintains the necessary connexion with the outside world, such as going to the mainland to procure food for himself and his companions.

The only time when the general rule of seclusion is broken in Vao is when the mortuary officials (with the possible exception of the chief official) appear in public at the feast called *Matean*. See p. 548.